

Carlisle circa 1890



Established by COL Richard Henry Pratt, the Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania was established in 1879 and was closed in 1918. It was the first Government operated non-reservation boarding school for Indians. Pratt believed that off-reservation schools established in white communities could accomplish the task of total assimilation by immersing Indians into the mainstream of American life. Pratt instituted a system where students lived among white families during the summer, hoping students would become part of the white community. Carlisle was the only off-reservation boarding school built in the East; all others were built in the West. (*American Indian Relief Council*)

In 1879, Pratt went to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Sioux reservations in the Dakotas and convinced parents and tribal elders to allow him to take 60 young boys and 24 girls to a new boarding school. Once at Carlisle, the children were stripped of all outward signs of tribal life that they had brought with them. The boys' braids were cut off; children were made to wear standard uniforms; and children were given new "white" names, including surnames. The school was run on a military style regimentation of classes and activities. The day began at 5:45 a.m., filled with exercise, military drills, industrial work, and formal schooling. There was less than an hour of free time during each day, and the students were in bed at 9:00 p.m. (*PBS Indian Country Diaries*)

The school was closed in 1918 and the Army regained control of the property, establishing a hospital to care for the large number of wounded returning from the European battlefield. Carlisle school's records were transferred to the central office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and from there to the National Archives. Although the Carlisle records represent the majority of such records, they are incomplete. There is very little correspondence, and there are serious gaps

in other records. (*Dickinson College Collections*)

Between 1880 and 1902, 25 off-reservation boarding schools were built by the Indian Bureau and 20,000 to 30,000 Native American children went through the system. Of these, five are prior Army property. Only in the case of Carlisle did the property revert back to Army control. (*PBS Indian Country Diaries*)

Carlisle School established the cemetery as early as November of 1879. Cross-referencing school records with Army burial records allows at least partial identification of 178 burials of Native American individuals. The cemetery also contains burials of Army personnel and family members, as well as some burials marked simply as 'Unknown'.

Carlisle Cemetery



ARMY CONSULTATION

Army extended invitations to consult on this issue to all Federally-recognized tribes. Because the historical records are incomplete, if you believe you have an ancestor buried at Carlisle and would like to consult on having their remains relocated to a cemetery of your choice, please contact: Army National Military Cemeteries, 1 Memorial Drive, Arlington, VA 22211 or: usarmy.pentagon.hqda-anmc.mbx.accountability-coe@mail.mil

From 2017-2019, Army has returned the remains of 11 students to their closest living relative.

Consultation Goals Include:

- Assess tribes with ancestral remains interred at Carlisle cemetery;
- Assist tribal families to provide Army with exhumation requests and affidavits;
- Develop processes for sensitive treatment of remains before/during/after excavation;
- Develop process for legal transfer to families and transport of remains;
- Work with tribes to develop list of which tribal members will be in attendance during excavation for ceremonial purposes or to take possession of remains.

References/Bibliography:

History and Culture [From: American Indian Relief Council]
http://www.nrcprograms.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools

Indian Boarding Schools [From: PBS Indian Country Diaries]
<http://www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history/boarding2.html>

Dickinson College collections:
<http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/collections/records-carlisle-indian-school>

Heard Museum Indian School exhibit:
<https://heard.org/exhibits/boardingschool/>

Army Cemeteries website:
<https://armycemeteries.army.mil/Cemeteries/Carlisle-Barracks-Main-Post-Cemetery>

Anyone interested in the return of tribal family members buried at other Indian Boarding Schools should contact the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). BIA will respond to official written inquiries from tribes or tribal members.

Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
MS-4606
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Carlisle Indian Industrial School

The Indian boarding school experience began in 1860 when the Indian Bureau (precursor to the Bureau of Indian Affairs) established the first Indian boarding school on the Yakima Indian Reservation in the state of Washington. These schools were part of a plan devised by 19th-century eastern reformers to use education as a tool to “assimilate” Indian tribes into the mainstream of the “American way of life.” By the 1880s, the U.S. operated 60 schools for 6,200 Indian students, including reservation day schools and reservation boarding schools. (*American Indian Relief Council*)

Carlisle Classroom

